

Version(s) with Markings to Show Changes Made.

In the title appearing on page 1 of the specification:

METHOD AND SYSTEM PROVIDING OUT-SOURCED, MERCHANDISE ~~RETURN~~  
~~SERVICES, AND~~ EXCHANGE AND ESCROW SERVICES

In the first section heading on page 1 and its following paragraph, beginning on page 1, line 1.

~~{UndrlnOn}~~ Cross-Reference to Related ~~and Provisional~~ Application(s) ~~{UndrlnOff}~~

This application ~~claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/188,901, filed March 13, 2000; and, is a continuation-in-part of~~ U.S. Patent Application No. 09/731,680, filed on December 6, 2000, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/174,466, filed December 30, 1999.

In parallel to that, this application concurrently claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/188,901, filed March 13, 2000.

In the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 12.

The method and system in accordance with the invention is broadly advantageous for establishing an out-sourced merchandise return service. For convenience of terminology in this description, the party or business concern or receiving the out-sourcing business is termed the Service Bureau or at alternative other times, the Association Service. ~~This service bureau~~ Service Bureau predominantly is linked for communication by means of a computer-implemented server such as an Internet domain (for example, e-mail communication by an e-mail server) or even more preferably, a web domain (for example, web-page matter communication by a web domain). The party(ies) who are out-sourcing the merchandise return services may be referred to, needless to say, as merchandisers. More particularly, the profile of the representative merchandiser most likely to participate in this method of outsourcing return services includes the following characteristics.

In the paragraph beginning at page 5, line 4.

Among other aspects and objects, there are, briefly stated, a secured exchange facility of the ~~service bureau~~ Service Bureau. The secured exchange facility has some features of escrow, except that the objects entrusted with the ~~service bureau~~ Service Bureau point-of-access associates are shipped to and fro by permission of the parties. The secured exchange utility of the ~~service bureau~~ Service Bureau promotes more assurances for buyers that they will have more leverage with sellers in cases of non-acceptable items. The secured exchange utility of the ~~service bureau~~ Service Bureau ought to promote the interests of sellers by bringing in more potential buyers into the e-commerce market. That ought to be an advantage of the seller community. If the market of buyers is bigger, then on-average the market for the seller's item(s) ought to get a better price.

In the paragraph beginning at page 11, line 13.

The next tack of the point-of-return associate is to route the returned item according to the instructions gotten by the packing slip. These instructions might come directly from the e-tailer. Alternatively, the instructions might have been composed by the ~~service-bureau~~ Service Bureau 44. The instructions might be unchanged from the moment the bar-coded packing slip was created during the fulfillment process. More preferably, since the instructions are likely to be downloaded over the Internet or web, then this affords the e-tailer, the ~~service-bureau~~ Service Bureau, or both in cooperation with each other, to dynamically update the downloadable instruction set depending on changed circumstances.

In the paragraph beginning at page 12, line 25.

With reference again to FIGURE 1, the ~~service-bureau~~ Service Bureau 44 best services its populous community of e-tailers (eg., 14) and brick-of-mortar point-of-return associates 42 with a variety of association services. For instance, the ~~service-bureau~~ Service Bureau might compile a set of quality standards on about every aspect of the operation. The quality standards might insist that the point-of-return associates provide a clean and accessible store. That customer handling is speedy and affable. The point-of-return associates might be educated in diplomatic ways of handling irate customers, and not further fueling the angst. In respect of the e-tailers, they too must meet standards so that one or a few might not drag down the reputation of the community as a whole. Hence, the e-tailers are likely to be persuaded to the wisdom of a relatively relaxed return policy. If the criteria by which returns will be accepted is too stringent, then perhaps every customer attempting a return is going to be disappointed. To inform the public that there is an association and apparatus set up to facilitate returns, when in fact returns are seldom granted, is more likely to damage goodwill than to either build goodwill or just prevent its loss. Therefore, the return policies of the various e-tailers have to be in fact real and not illusory.

In the paragraph beginning at page 13, line, 12.

Indeed, another role for the ~~service-bureau~~ Service Bureau 44 is to draft a short list of uniform return policies. The draft return policies are available for adoption by the e-tailers. Indeed the e-tailers likely would be induced to adopt a return policy from the association's menu. The purpose behind keeping the variety of return policies down to a few makes sense with the point-of-return associates. They ought to be so familiar with each one of the return policies on the menu that they can instantly act on any policy before a customer and apply the return policy accurately. The purpose behind keeping the different available return policies uniform serves a lot of the same reasons. The point-of-return associates ought not have to read and study a closely written legal document in order to facilitate a simple return. It will bog down the return service, and be un-popular with both customers and point-of-return associates. Of course, one of the association's persistent tasks is finding balance between what effectively serves the e-tailer community against what effectively serves the point-of-return associate community.

In the paragraph beginning at page 20, line 15.

The secured exchange facility of the service 40 can be modified by varying rules-of-the-service, as follows. Assume sender 50<sup>1</sup> agrees to send item 55<sup>1</sup> to receiver 50<sup>0</sup> either for payment or exchange of item 55<sup>0</sup>, it not mattering which for the moment. After the agreement has been reached between the parties 50<sup>1</sup> and 50<sup>0</sup>, the use of the service 40 can work this way. The chosen point-of-access associate 42a of sender 50<sup>1</sup> is given a description of the item-to-be-sent 55<sup>1</sup>, which description presumptively conforms to an acceptable model format established by the ~~service bureau~~ Service Bureau 44. A clerk of point-of-access associate 42a is authorized to use the description, which description is either given to the clerk in a certified form by the sender 50<sup>1</sup> or else downloaded from the service 40's web site 30, to use to make the following determination. That is, the clerk makes a determination if the item 55<sup>1</sup> is reasonably what it should be. The clerk's determination may be binding on the receiver 50<sup>0</sup> to perform as obliged (eg., pay if payment was agreed upon), or else provisionally binding on the receiver to perform at least in part as obliged. Performance in part might include having the receiver 50<sup>0</sup> pay in part (eg., to at least cover one-way or round-trip shipping plus a fee) else deposit its swap item 55<sup>0</sup> with its chosen point-of-access associate 42b.

In the abstract of the disclosure.

A secured exchange method provides a prospective buyer with a chance to inspect the goods of a remote seller as a condition precedent to acceptance. The method is implemented by a distributed community of intermediary point-of-access associates who physically host such inspections, ~~as well as by a managing inspection transaction information service~~. The seller delivers the goods to one of the point-of-access associates, who in turn ships to another point-of-access associate, which is where the prospective buyer will inspect. There the prospective buyer gets the opportunity to inspect the offered goods ~~and, upon buyer's application to accept, that particular point-of-access associate accesses the pertinent terms of acceptance from the managing inspection transaction information service~~. If the pertinent terms of acceptance are met, the point-of-access associate releases the goods to the buyer.